

REMARKS

In the present Amendment, claim 1 has been amended to incorporate the subject matter of Claims 2-4. Claims 2-4 have been canceled.

Claim 5 has been amended to change its dependency.

Claims 19-32 have been added as new claims. Claims 19-22 are supported by the specification, for example, on page 7, lines 10-12 and 21-23. Claims 23-27 are supported by the specification, for example, in the sentence bridging pages 3 and 4 and the sentence bridging pages 15 and 16. Claims 28-32 are supported by the specification, for example, on page 14, lines 23-25.

No new matter has been added and entry of the Amendment is respectfully requested. Upon entry of the Amendment, Claims 1, 5-8 and 11-32 will be all the claims pending in the application.

In the Office Action dated November 3, 2003, the declaration has been objected to.

In response, Applicants submitted a Supplemental Declaration and Power of Attorney, as suggested by the Examiner, with the Response filed January 30, 2004. For the Examiner's convenience, Applicants attach herewith a copy of the Supplemental Declaration and Power of Attorney. The Examiner is respectfully requested to reconsider and withdraw the objection.

At page 2 of the Office Action dated November 3, 2003, the specification has been objected to as allegedly containing new matter.

In the Advisory Action dated February 13, 2004, the Examiner indicates that this objection has been withdrawn. See page 2 of the Advisory Action.

At page 3 of the Office Action dated November 3, 2003, Claims 1-8 and 11-18 have been rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as allegedly being unpatentable over Jackson et al (USP 5,670,702) and Purvis et al (USP 5,981,818) in view of EP 68,785.

Applicants respectfully submit that the present claims are patentable over the cited references for at least the following reasons.

One object of the claimed invention is to control the contents of the methanol with which at least one compound selected from methacrylic acid and methacrolein is esterified.

Conventionally, it has been known that the methanol recovered from a process other than esterification of methacrylic acid is inappropriate as methanol used in the esterification of methacrylic acid, because there are many kinds of impurities in the recovered methanol, adversely affecting the esterification. As a result, complicated and costly purification of the methanol and/or the esterified product had been required when the recovered methanol was utilized in the esterification. See, "Description of Related Art" of the present specification.

Under such circumstances, the claimed invention has been accomplished based on the findings that the specific by-products interfere with the esterification. However, it is still unclear what impurities adversely affect the esterification step in the process. As a result, it has been found that very simple purification, such as distillation, of the recovered methanol is sufficient to provide a methanol which can be used in the esterification even in an industrial scale, when the amount of the specific by-products in the methanol is controlled to be within the range as recited in the present claims.

Applicants respectfully submit that these findings and advantages provided by the claimed invention are not obvious over the cited references.

In addition, as a result of the claimed invention, the methanol recovered from the decomposition of methyl t-butyl ether can be utilized in the production of methyl methacrylate. That is, all the products produced by the decomposition of methyl t-butyl ether can be effectively utilized to produce the methyl methacrylate. This is significant in an industrial scale of production process of methyl methacrylate. Further, the claimed invention provides a production process of methyl methacrylate with high purity from methyl t-butyl ether.

In view of the foregoing, Applicants respectfully submit that the present invention is not obvious over the cited references and the rejection should be withdrawn.

In view of the above, reconsideration and allowance of this application are now believed to be in order, and such actions are hereby solicited. If any points remain in issue which the Examiner feels may be best resolved through a personal or telephone interview, the Examiner is kindly requested to contact the undersigned at the telephone number listed below.

The USPTO is directed and authorized to charge all required fees, except for the Issue Fee and the Publication Fee, to Deposit Account No. 19-4880. Please also credit any overpayments to said Deposit Account.

Respectfully submitted,



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